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PROVIDENCE

Providence police officer takes stand in assault trial

by: [Adriana Rozas Rivera](#)

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) — The bench trial of a Providence police officer accused of [assaulting a political rival](#) resumed Thursday.

Jeann Lugo, 35, faces a simple assault charge after he allegedly attacked Rhode Island Political Cooperative co-founder Jennifer Rourke. Lugo was off-duty at the time of the incident which happened during an abortion rally outside the Rhode Island State House.

Lugo, the first witness on the stand Thursday, claimed his priority as an off-duty officer was to apprehend [a suspect who assaulted Josh Mello](#).

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“The first hit knocked him out and then I observed the [suspect] eventually kicking Josh Mello in the head,” Lugo recalled.

BACKGROUND: Providence officer charged with assaulting political rival at abortion rally ➤

Lugo said in his attempts to capture the suspect, he applied two “police-trained open-handed distractionary strike techniques” on Rourke to “get her off” him.

“I was going to one: lose the suspect, and two: I was worried about my firearm being exposed and maybe even coming out of my holster,” Lugo explained.

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Prosecutors argued Lugo should have identified himself to help the situation.

“All this stuff about Mello, it’s not relevant,” the prosecutor said. “What’s relevant is you strike Ms. Rourke so you can make an arrest without identifying yourself.”

“Sir, it happened very quickly and I had moments before I lost that suspect,” Lugo said to the prosecutor.

Closing arguments wrapped up just before 4 p.m., with the judge saying he would not hand down a decision Thursday.

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According to the police report, Rourke said she was struck in the head three times. She identified her assailant as Lugo. In [footage of the protest](#), a man who looks like Lugo appears to punch Rourke in the face.

“This is what it is to be a Black woman running for office,” Rourke wrote on [social media](#). “I won’t give up.”

In late August, the judge overseeing the trial [dismissed a disorderly conduct charge against Lugo](#).

Lugo was running against Rourke in the race to replace Senate Majority Leader Mike McCaffrey. Lugo dropped out of the race after the incident, according to a [now-deactivated Twitter account](#).

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Lugo is currently on paid administrative leave. Providence Police Chief Hugh Clements [recommended that he be terminated](#) in the wake of the incident, but Lugo can’t be fired outright because he’s protected by the Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights (LEOBOR).

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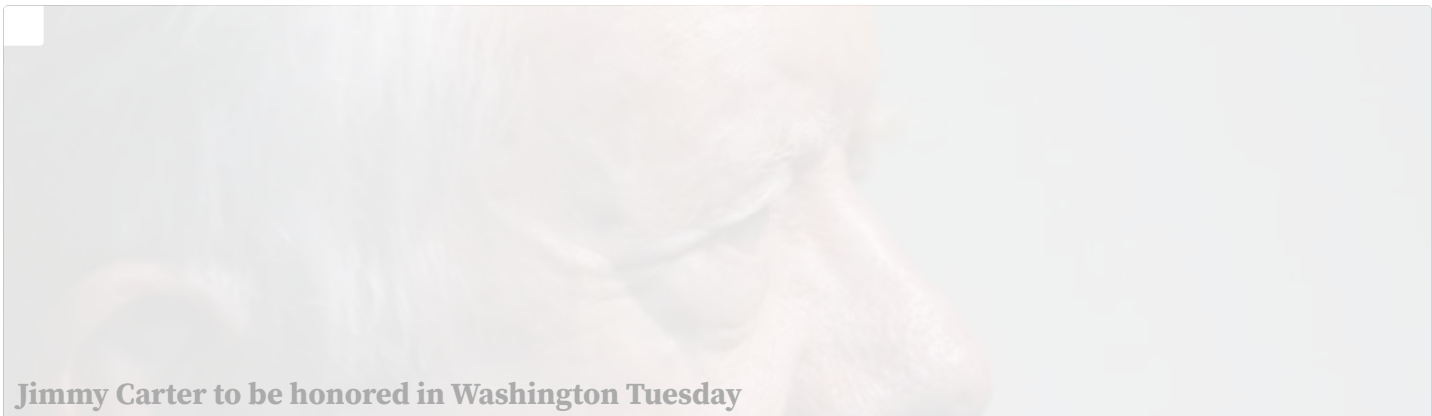
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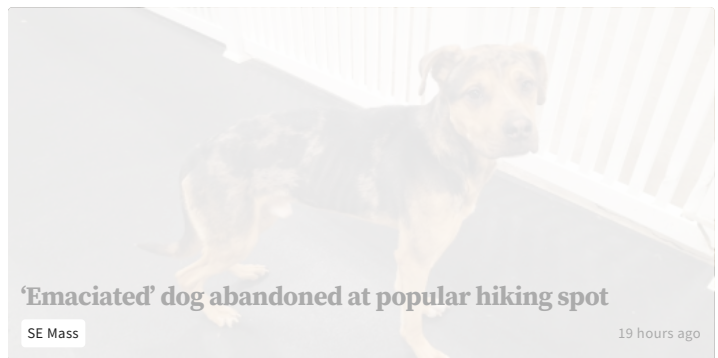
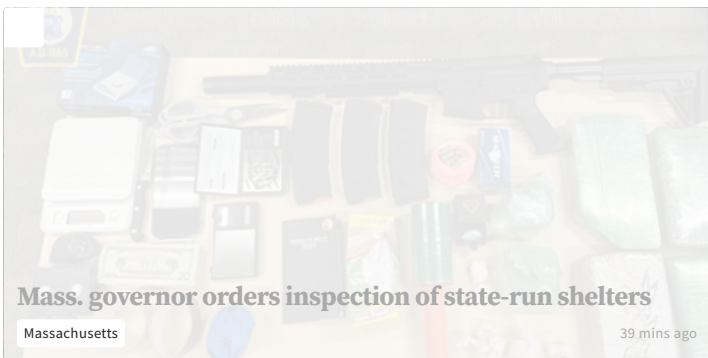
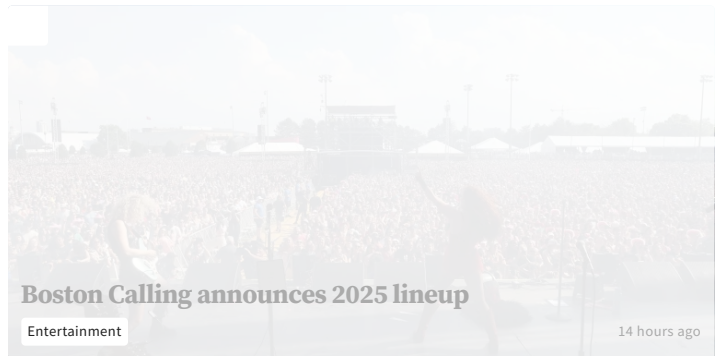
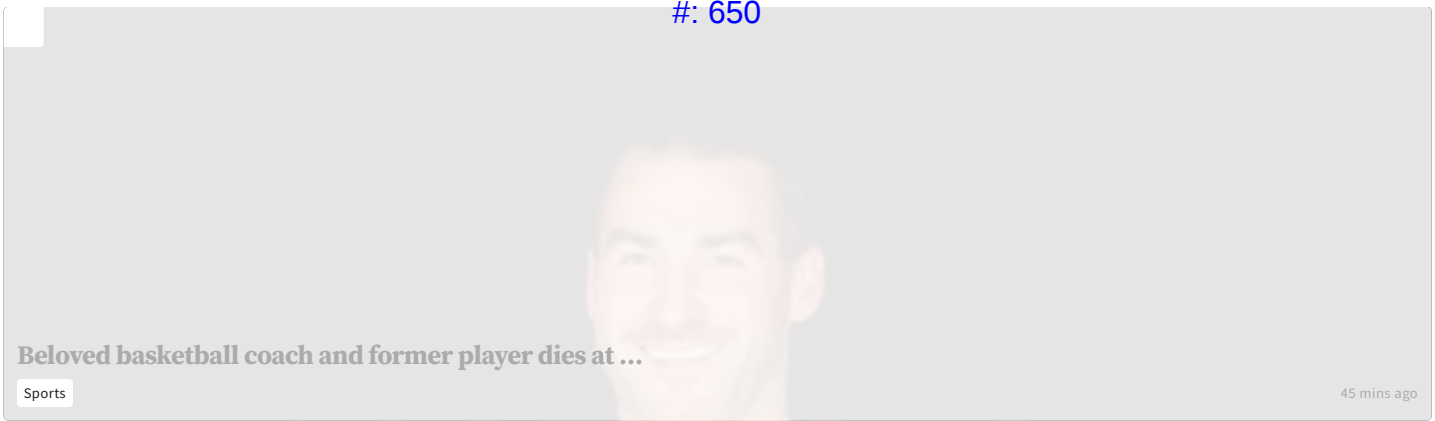
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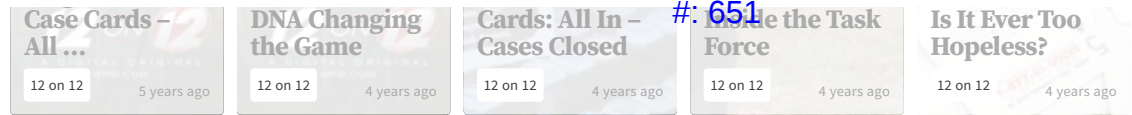
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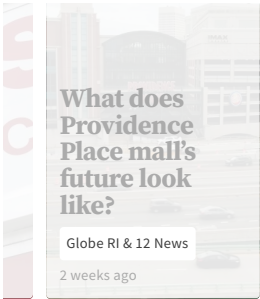
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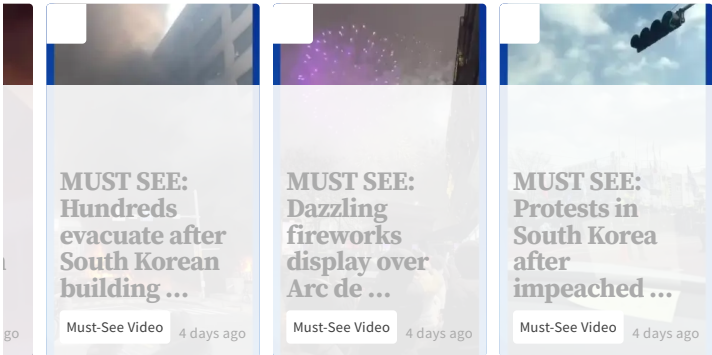


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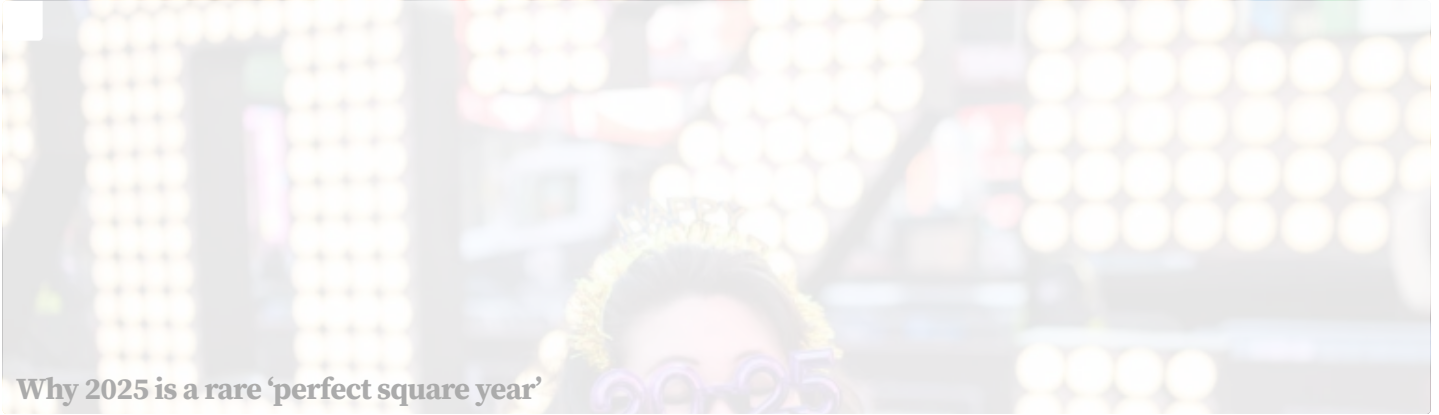


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